NATION

Meiteis term Prez rule as undemocratic

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BUSINESS

Wholesale price inflation eases to 2.31% in Jan

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India suffers 0-3 loss to Japan in Asia Team C'ship

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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MAGA + MIGA = MEGA PARTNERSHIP

India and US to double trade to $500B by 2030; boost defence ties with sale of fighter jet F-35

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has coined a new term 'Make India Great Again' (MIGA) inspired by US President Donald Trump's motto 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) and said the two visions form "MEGA partneRship for prosperity".

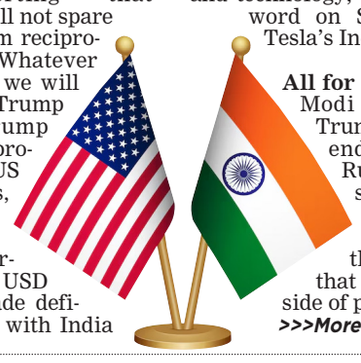
During their meeting at the White House Oval Office, Trump welcomed Modi with a long handshake, and a bear hug and said, "We missed you a lot." Trump pulled out a chair for his "great friend" Modi too.

USD 500B trade by 2030

India and the US have resolved to more than double the two-way trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 and announced plans for a bilateral trade agreement while bringing down duties and increasing market access. "India is also reforming laws to welcome US nuclear technology," Trump said.

India and tariffs

Trump said India will buy more oil, gas and military hardware from America to bring down the trade deficit while asserting that Washington will not spare New Delhi from reciprocal tariffs. "Whatever India charges, we will charge them," Trump said. Trump approved reciprocal tariffs on US trade partneRs, warning it could begin 1 April. US currently has a USD 45.7 billion trade deficit with India, with India exporting USD 87.4 billion of goods to the US. India enjoys a trade surplus with its top trading partner US. India cut its tariffs from 13 per cent to 11 per cent in its Budget.



F-35 fighter jets for India

Trump said US will increase its military sales to India by billions of dollaRs and will provide India with F35 Stealth fighteRs. F35 jets are the most lethal fighter aircraft.

Adani 'peRsonal matter'

The indictment of billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani in a court in the United States is a "private matter", Modi said while addressing a rare 44-minute press conference with Trump. "FiRstly, India is a democratic country, and our culture and our thought philosophy is, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. We consider the whole world as one family. I believe every Indian is mine. Secondly, the leadeRs of the two nations never meet, sit or talk about such private matteRs," he said.

No talk on Tesla

Though Modi and billionaire Elon Musk discussed space and technology, there was no word on Starlink and Tesla's India entry.

All for peace

Modi welcomed Trump's efforts to end Ukraine-Russia war. He said India has not been neutral on the war and that it is on the side of peace. *—PTI*

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US President Donald Trump gives Prime Minister Narendra Modi a bear hug at the White House, in Washington DC, US, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

India and the United States have stood firmly together in the fight against terrorism. We agree that concerted action is necessary to eradicate cross-border terrorism.

I support Donald Trump's efforts towards finding a possible solution to end the war. The world somehow feels India has been neutral during the war.

NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER

I assume he (Musk) wants to do business in India. But India is a very hard place to do business in because of the tariffs. They have the highest tariffs. It's a hard place to do business.

Modi is a much tougher negotiator than me, and he is a much better negotiator than me. There is not even a contest.

DONALD TRUMP, US PRESIDENT

Bangladesh matter up to Modi: Trump

During a meeting at the White House, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi shared his concerns regarding the recent developments in Bangladesh with US President Donald Trump. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri revealed that the situation in Bangladesh was a key topic of discussion, with Modi outlining India's peRspective. Misri expressed hopes for a constructive relationship moving forward, despite ongoing challenges. Relations between India and Bangladesh have deteriorated significantly following the flight of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina amid violent protests and rising attacks on minorities. *-PTI*

US approves extradition of Rana

US President Donald Trump announced the extradition of Tahawwur Rana, implicated in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, during a press conference. Rana, a Canadian national of Pakistani descent, is currently in a Los Angeles detention centre. His extradition follows a January ruling by the US Supreme Court, allowing India to seek justice. *—PTI*

BRICS is dead, says Trump

US President Donald Trump has labelled BRICS as "dead," asserting it was established for a "bad purpose." During a recent press briefing, he threatened a 100 per cent tariff on BRICS nations if they attempt to replace the US dollar in trade, insisting that such nations would face severe economic consequences for defying the dollar's dominance. *—ANI*

PM announces 2 new consulates in US

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the opening of two new Indian consulates in the US, one each in Boston and Los Angeles, following his meeting with US President Donald Trump. The move marks a significant expansion of India's diplomatic presence in the US and is aimed at helping the Indian-American community in those cities. *—Agencies*

BJP to form govt in Delhi on 19-20 Feb

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The BJP's swearing-in ceremony for the new Delhi government is expected on 19 or 20 February. Party leadeRs indicated that addressing clean drinking water supply and enhancing civic infrastructure will be top priorities. Manjinder SiRsa, newly elected BJP MLA and party national secretary, noted that the Prime Minister, returning from a foreign trip, will appoint observeRs for the BJP legislature party meet, scheduled for 18-19 February. MLA Abhay Verma dismissed talk of a leadeRship race, affirming that Chief Minister will be chosen democratically. *—PTI*

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PM's panel to meet on Monday for next CEC selection

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

A selection committee led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to convene on Monday to decide on the next Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). The committee also includes Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, and Home Minister Amit Shah. The meeting is crucial as the current CEC, Rajiv Kumar, is due to retire on 18 February. The committee will recommend a candidate from a shortlist prepared by a search committee. The upcoming meeting may also address the appointment of a new election commissioner to fill the vacancy left by Rajiv Kumar. *—PTI*

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GIM 2025: Karnataka signs ₹2,220 cr MoUs

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

On the second day of the Global InvestoRs' Meet-2025, the Karnataka government has announced the signing of Memoranda of UndeRstanding with nine companies, amounting to Rs 2,220 crore.

Among the notable agreements, Sweden-based bus and truck manufacturer Volvo has committed to expanding its manufacturing facility in Hoskote, near Bengaluru, with an investment of Rs 1,400 crore.

BBM Sports Fields & Halls Contracting LLC has pledged Rs250 crore towards the development of sports infrastructure. Steel Force Building Materials LLC will invest Rs250 crore in the production of steel and related products.

Seritech Farm LLP is set to invest Rs 25 crore for the manufacturing and exporting of yarn and silk fabric products. NAZ Star Trading LLC will contribute Rs5 crore towards the production of garments, apparel, and textiles. Morex Group's plans to construct a convention centre for Rs150 crore, and Delwan Group Rs 120 crore into a hotel and resort. Club Sulaimani Food & Beverages LLP will invest Rs5 crore in restaurants, and Yusur Holding Pvt Ltd is developing a wellness centre in Mysuru with a budget of Rs15 crore, as stated by the government. *—PTI*

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US plane with 119 deportees to land in Amritsar on 15 Feb

CHANDIGARH, 14 FEB

A US aircraft carrying 119 illegal Indian immigrants is scheduled to arrive at Amritsar airport on 15 February, marking the second influx of deportees since the Trump administration initiated a crackdown on undocumented migrants following its inauguration last month.

The flight is anticipated to touch down around 10 pm on Saturday. Among the 119 deportees, 67 originate from Punjab, 33 from Haryana, eight from Gujarat, three from Uttar Pradesh, two each from Goa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, and one each from Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. Another US deportation flight is already expected on 16 February.

PHOTO/X

This development follows a recent incident where a aircraft returned 104 illegal Indian immigrants. The majority of these individuals had hoped for a better life in the United States but faced haRsh realities when apprehended at the US border. The intensified enforcement actions by US authorities targeting illegal immigrants have been a notable change since Donald Trump's presidency began. Many deportees, particularly from Punjab, migrated via perilous "donkey routes," a term used to describe illegal pathways to enter the US, often at significant financial risk.

Political figures have expressed concerns regarding the deportations, with Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema questioning why US flights predominantly land in Amritsar rather than other states. *—PTI*

Karnataka shines at Nat'l Games 2025

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

As the curtains fall on the 38th National Games on Friday, Karnataka's athletes delivered an exceptional performance, securing a total of 80 medals—34 gold, 18 silver, and 28 bronze—placing the state fifth in the overall medal tally. The athletes set a benchmark for future sporting events, inspiring the next generation to aim higher.

The state's swimmeRs were particularly dominant. Rising star Dhinidhi Desinghu shattered record in the 200m freestyle in the women's category, clocking 2:03.24. Srihari Nataraj clinched gold in the men's 200m freestyle with a time of 1:50.57. Karnataka further emerged as a commanding force in hockey, with the men's team clinching a hard-fought gold medal after a thrilling 3-2 victory over Uttar Pradesh in the final on ThuRsday. Shamanth CS, Bharat Mahalingappa Kurtakoti and Abharan Sudev B scored a goal apiece for the team.

Meanwhile, in an outstanding display of skill, strength, and agility, Karnataka also secured 17 medals and was declared the fiRst runner-up in the overall Kalaripayattu tournament.—*Salar news*

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ASIA'S BIGGEST AIRSHOW

Sun sets on Aero India 2025

PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

The final day of Aero India 2025 ushered in a thrilling spectacle as crowds flocked to catch breathtaking aerial stunts. Enthusiastic spectatoRs rushed to stands to witness the remarkable display of manoeuvres performed by skilled pilots.

The morning show featured an impressive line-up of ten aircraft, including iconic models such as the Russian Su-57 and the American F-16, alongside HAL's LUH, HTT-40, LCA Mk-1A, and IJT, as well as IAF's Su-30 MKI and The Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team.

In what looked like a scene from a sci-fi movie, people learnt about Boeing's product portfolio in a sensor-activated transparent screen with the flick of their hands.

Vasilii Fainveits, CEO, CTO & Founder of Latvia-based Fixar, a software and aircraft design developing firm said he found a perfect partner in Hyderabad-based Aksi Aerospace Group.

The excitement culminated in a final display at 2.30pm, featuring an array of aircraft, with the F-16 being replaced by the striking KC-135. Meanwhile, exhibitoRs began to pack up, although most were in high spirits. The day contrasted with the chaotic Bengaluru traffic, which, despite police presence, became a hurdle for many attendees. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Rapido launches 'pink' bikes for women in K'taka

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Ride-hailing service Rapido has announced plans to introduce a new fleet of 'Pink Rapido' bikes in Karnataka, specifically designed to be driven by women for women. The initiative is set to be launched by the end of this year.

Co-founder Pavan Guntupalli made the announcement during the Global InvestoRs Summit, stating, "Our aim is to create 25,000 job opportunities for women through the introduction of female captains on Rapido bikes. If we can enable a woman to travel safely with an unknown driver and reach her destination comfortably, we will consider it a success." *—PTI*

Two killed in separate accidents in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Two individuals lost their lives in separate road accidents in the city on Thursday. The first incident occurred at approximately 5:45 am on Mysuru Road, when 46-year-old auto-rickshaw driver Suresh lost control of his vehicle while negotiating a turn. Police reports indicate he was speeding at the time, leading to a crash that resulted in critical head injuries. Emergency services quickly transported him to Victoria Hospital, where he sadly succumbed to his injuries on Friday morning. In a separate incident around 10.30am, a 35-year-old pedestrian was struck by a speeding tanker truck while crossing road near Upkar Layout. *—Salar News*

BBMP to vaccinate 1.84 lakh stray dogs

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has set a target to administer Combined Vaccine Programme to 1.84 lakh stray dogs within its jurisdiction, announced Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath. Speaking at the launch event held at the BBMP central office premises, he stated that this is the first time in country that a civic body is implementing such an initiative. The ambitious drive involves an expenditure of Rs 4.98 crore for vaccines and storage facilities. BBMP's Animal Husbandry Department is conducting regular sterilisation and anti-rabies events programmes in city. *—Salar News*

Kolar man gets 20 yrs in jail for rape of minor

KOLAR, 14 FEB

A POCSO Special Court has sentenced a taxi driver to twenty years in prison for the kidnapping, rape, and forced marriage of a 17-year-old girl. Judge Prasad KB delivered the verdict after hearing the case brought by the Bethamangala police, following a complaint lodged by Muninarayanappa from Kangandlahalli village within the jurisdiction of Kyasamballi police. Alongside the lengthy prison sentence, the court imposed a fine of ₹ 45,000 on Gangadhar and directed the government to pay the victim Rs 4,00,000 in compensation. *—Salar News*

BJP denies RSS link to Udayagiri violence

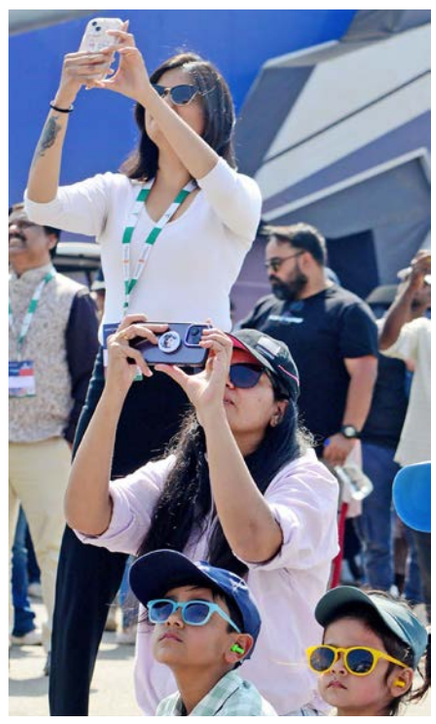
MYSURU, 14 FEB

L Nagendra, former MLA and chief of the City BJP unit, addressed the media on Friday to clarify that Suresh, alias Panduranga, who was arrested in connection with the Udayagiri violence, has no affiliation with the RSS. His remarks came in response to allegations made by Congress leader M Lakshmana. At a press conference, Nagendra condemned Lakshmana for what he termed false accusations linking Suresh to the RSS. Meanwhile, Home Minister G Parameshwara visited the Udayagiri Police station to address the recent violence. Speaking to reporters, he defended the actions taken by the city police. *—Salar News*

ISRO develops world's largest propellant mixer

MYSURU, 14 FEB

ISRO on Friday said it has developed and realised the ten-tonne propellant mixer for solid motors. Solid propulsion plays a crucial role in Indian Space Transportation Systems and vertical mixer is one of the critical equipment in solid motor production, ISRO said in a statement. "Solid propellants are the backbone of rocket motors, and their production requires precise mixing of highly sensitive and hazardous ingredients," the statement read. *—PTI*



Massive crowd gathers at Yelahanka Air Force Station on the final day of Aero India 2025 ***PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Aero India: Hub of innovation & enthusiasm

Aero India highlighted aviation advancements, hosted 931 exhibitors, 500+ global delegates

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Aero India 2025 has successfully showcased the latest advancements in aviation and aerospace technology, drawing over 500 delegates from 84 countries, including defence ministers and service chiefs. The biennial event has solidified its status as Asia's largest air show, featuring 931 exhibitors, of which 782 were Indian. The gathering also included 58 Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and 115 global CEOs, reflecting the event's significance in the industry.

In addition to the dynamic aerial performances, the exhibition floor buzzed with activity, particularly at stalls selling military apparel and souvenirs from The Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT). Bengaluru-based drone manufacturer Scandron launched a new 200-kg capacity logistics drone, despite the distracting roar of nearby aircraft. Despite the excitement, the city's traffic chaos posed challenges for many attendees, as roads surrounding the venue became congested. Yet the enthusiasm for Aero India 2025 remained palpable, as the event concluded on a high note, marking a successful chapter in history of aviation.

Surya Kiran team performs at Yelahanka Air Force Station in Bengaluru on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Meanwhile, on the final day of Aero India 2025, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited has announced that the HAL Management Academy, its nodal training agency, and the Indian Institute of Information Technology, Dharwad have signed a MoU to strengthen industry-academia collaboration in advanced technologies.

The partnership will focus on joint research, internships, and technical education in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, Robotics, AR/VR, and Digital Manufacturing, particularly in applications relevant to the aerospace and defence sectors, stated a press release issued by HAL on Friday.

Under this MoU, HAL officers will have opportunities to pursue higher education at IIIT Dharwad, while students will gain hands-on experience through internships at HAL's various divisions. *—PTI*

Traffic gridlock on last day of show

Bengaluru witnessed massive traffic congestion on Friday, the final day of the Aero India 2025 show, as over one lakh visitors flocked to the Yelahanka Air Force Station. Key roads, including Airport Road, Hebbal, Rajanakunte, Yelahanka, Yelahanka New Town, GKVK, and Devanahalli, were choked, with vehicles crawling at a snail's pace.

Morning peak hours saw vehicles stranded for nearly two kilometres on the elevated flyover leading to Bengaluru International Airport. Yelahanka's service roads and flyovers were packed.

The congestion worsened as office-goers and air show attendees clashed on the same routes. Vehicles inched forward every 15–20 minutes, causing tailbacks stretching 4–5 km around Yelahanka.

With heavy traffic expected to persist, commuters expressed frustration over the delays. The biennial event, which opened to the public, saw record footfalls, significantly impacting traffic. *—Salar News*

State gets Clean Mobility Policy 2025–30

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

Energy Minister KJ George, during Invest Karnataka 2025 on Friday, unveiled Clean Mobility Policy 2025–30, which aims to position the state as Asia's top clean mobility hub while accelerating the state's transition to a sustainable, future-ready transportation ecosystem.

The policy targets investments of Rs 50,000 crore across the clean mobility value chain, with a vision to generate one lakh new jobs in the sector.

The government signed an MoU with SISA, a global leader in forensics-driven cybersecurity solutions for the digital payments industry, to set up a state-of-the-art cybersecurity centre in Bengaluru.

Ex-Greek PM George Papandreou, DyCM DK Shivakumar, MB Patil, Shashi Tharoor, & KJ George at Global Investors Meet ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

The government also honoured 38 outstanding Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

K'taka gets over Rs 10 lakh cr in investment proposals

Medium and Large Industries Minister MB Patil announced investment proposals exceeding Rs 10.26 lakh crore at the Global Investors' Meet, poised to generate six lakh jobs. Notably, 75 per cent of these investments will occur outside Bengaluru, with 45 per cent directed to North Karnataka. *—PTI*

K'TAKA EYES GLOBAL INVESTMENTS: DKS

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Friday said that the state is not competing for investments with other states or cities in India, but is competing at a global level. "The investors can believe in Karnataka, it never fails. You heard industrialists Sajjan Jindal and Anand Mahindra sharing their success story and singing praise for the state." "Investing in Karnataka is investing for the future. Investing in Karnataka is in the interest of businesses and the country. We aim to develop not just Bengaluru, but other parts of the state as well -- Beyond Bengaluru". *—PTI*

K'TAKA 'LODESTAR' OF ECONOMY: THAROOR

MP and former Union Minister Shashi Tharoor, emphasised the importance of unity for progress amidst global challenges at the Invest Karnataka-2025 summit. He praised Karnataka as a "lodestar" of India's economic growth, highlighting its conducive ecosystem for entrepreneurship and innovation. He stressed the need for job creation, citing alarming levels of unemployment, especially among the youth. Former Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou has stressed the importance of citizen engagement over bureaucratic expertise during a panel discussion. *—PTI*

MUDA CASE

Fresh plaint filed against CM's wife

MYSURU, 14 FEB

Activist Snehamayi Krishna has lodged a fresh complaint against Parvathi Siddaramaiah, the wife of Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, alleging that she unlawfully acquired and subsequently sold a MUDA site.

Speaking to reporters after filing his case with the Lokayukta, Krishna claimed that Parvathi purchased a 50x80 MUDA site in 1997, while her husband was the Chief Minister, from former Chamundeshwari Congress MLA M. Satyanarayana. The site, located in the Dattagalli layout (Site Number 3553), was supposedly allotted to the MLA by the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA). Krishna alleged that Parvathi acquired the site for Rs 24 lakh and later sold it to Congress leader Sulochana P. Ramesh for Rs 1 crore, despite MUDA regulations prohibiting site owners from selling or transferring their properties for ten years.

PHOTO: PTI

Despite an ongoing investigation by Lokayukta police regarding MUDA-related corruption involving the Chief Minister and his family, Krishna asserts that this particular transaction has not been thoroughly examined.

He furthermore urged the Lokayukta to conduct a comprehensive investigation into irregularities within the MUDA. *—Salar News*

PRESIDENT IN CITY

Murmu urges women to break stereotypes, talks mental health

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

President Droupadi Murmu urged woman to be courageous and dream big. Speaking at the inaugural session of the International Women's Conference of the Art of Living in the City, she said that India's women's power is rising.

"It is not possible to break barriers and challenge stereotypes without mental strength. I urge every woman to gather courage, dream big and utilise all her strength and potential to achieve her dreams. Every little step that each of you takes toward your goal is a step toward a developed India and a developed world," she said.

President Droupadi Murmu with BJP MP Hemamalini & Spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar at the International Women's Conference ***PHOTO: PTI***

Murmu also stressed how in today's world, mental health has become one of the most crucial issues facing people of all age groups. "Women, in particular, are at the crossroads of multiple challenges, including competing professionally, meeting societal expectations, and fulfilling personal aspirations. *—PTI*

SC junks Jayalalithaa's heir's plea to return assets

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a plea filed by the legal heir of former Tamil Nadu chief minister J Jayalalithaa seeking the return of the properties confiscated in a case against her and said abatement of proceedings did not mean she was acquitted of the crime.

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma referred to its observations in the 2017 judgment in State of Karnataka vs J Jayalalithaa where proceedings stood abated as she died during the pendency of the appeal.

"It should imply that further consideration of the case with regard to the correctness of the judgment of the high court, acquitting the accused number 1 (Jayalalithaa) would not be taken further by this court. However, abatement would not imply that the judgment of the high court has attained finality," it added.

PHOTO: PTI

The top court was hearing a plea filed by Jayalalithaa's niece claiming right over the confiscated property belonging to her in the disproportionate assets (DA) case in which she was indicted by the apex court. *—PTI*

HC to hear PIL on cabinet rank for 42 MLAs & MLCs

BENGALURU, 14 FEB

The Karnataka High Court on Friday hearing a Public Interest Litigation filed by a city resident contesting the state government's decision to grant cabinet rank to 42 legislators, including Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of the Legislative Council (MLCs), posted the matter for next hearing on 21 February. Senior advocate J Sai Deepak, representing the petitioner asserted that appointing legislators as chairpersons of boards would not have been problematic.

The plea highlights that on 26 January, the state government issued an order granting cabinet rank to 34 legislators, in addition to eight who already held status. *—PTI*

NCP elevates Munde into 'core group'

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

Maharashtra cabinet minister Dhananjay Munde, facing political heat over the alleged involvement of his close aide in an extortion case in his home turf Beed district, has been made a member of his party NCP's newly formed "core group". Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has formed a "core group" comprising senior leaders to work on strengthening the organisation ahead of the local body polls, taking policy decisions and initiating welfare schemes. Besides, Ajit Pawar, NCP working president Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare, Chhagan Bhujbal, Dilip, and Munde are members of the key body. *—PTI*

NOTA hits the bottom in 2024 Lok Sabha polls

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The None Of The Above (NOTA) option in EVMs recorded its lowest percentage share in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls since its introduction in 2013, according to data shared by the Election Commission. The option was implemented in a Lok Sabha poll for the first time in 2014. According to the polls panel's Atlas-2024, a book containing data from last year's Lok Sabha polls, there has been a gradual decline in NOTA votes over the past three Lok Sabha elections, from 1.08 per cent in 2014 to 0.99 per cent in 2024. While the percentage might seem small, the total number of NOTA votes can still be significant, especially in seats with comparatively lower winning margins, where the NOTA votes could have affected outcomes in some constituencies. *—PTI*

MHA seeks Prez nod to prosecute AAP's Jain

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Union home ministry has requested the president for grant of sanction to prosecute AAP leader and former Delhi minister Satyendar Jain in a money-laundering case being investigated by the ED, sources said on Friday. The sanction against the 60-year-old politician has been sought under Section 218 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, they said. The ministry requested the sanction from the president of India on the basis of an Enforcement Directorate investigation and the presence of "adequate proof", they added. The federal agency booked Jain in a money-laundering case linked to alleged hawala dealings and arrested him in May 2022. Held the health, power and a few other portfolios when he was taken into ED custody. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Kottayam ragging: UDF alleges SFI link to accused

KOTTAYAM, 14 FEB

Congress-led Opposition UDF on Friday claimed that the accused in the Kottayam Government Nursing College ragging case have connections with the Left student organisation, SFI. Speaking to reporters, Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan alleged that the accused in the Kottayam ragging case are members of SFI and that the Kerala Government Nursing Students Association (KGNSA) has links with the Left-affiliated student organisation. However, Higher Education Minister R Bindu stated that stringent action would be initiated against the accused in the Kottayam ragging incident. "Everyone knows they are SFI activists, yet they are now denying it," Satheesan said. Meanwhile, a team will visit the college to conduct an inquiry. *—PTI*

India-US to boost tech ties, focus on AI

AI, semiconductors, data centres & quantum were in focus as the duo pledge to collaborate

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Artificial Intelligence, innovation and next-generation technologies figured prominently during the high-stakes discussion between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump at the White House, as the two sides announced transformative measures, including the US-India TRUST initiative, roadmap on accelerating AI infrastructure and INDUS Innovation, to boost tech ties.

Artificial intelligence, semiconductors, data centres, and quantum - the essential building blocks shaping an intelligent, new-age world - were in focus as the two leaders held bilateral talks at Washington, DC.

India and the US pledged to enhance collaboration in areas of critical and emerging technologies and announced the launch of the US-India Transforming the Relationship Utilising Strategic Technology (TRUST) initiative.

According to India-US joint statement, the TRUST initiative aims to catalyse government-to-government, academia and private-sector collaboration to promote the application of critical and emerging technologies in areas like defence, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, quantum, biotechnology, energy and space, while encouraging the use of verified technology vendors and ensuring sensitive technologies are protected.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting with US President Donald Trump at the White House, in Washington, DC, USA, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

As a central pillar of the 'TRUST' initiative, the leaders committed to work with US and Indian private industry to put forward a US-India roadmap on accelerating AI infrastructure by the end of the year, identifying constraints to financing, building, powering, and connecting large-scale American-origin AI infrastructure in India with milestones and future actions.

The leaders also announced the launch of INDUS Innovation, a new innovation bridge modelled after the successful INDUS-X platform, that will advance US-India industry and academic partnerships and foster investments in space, energy, and other emerging technologies to maintain leadership for both sides in innovation and to meet the needs of the 21st century.

The two leaders committed to further commercial space collaboration through industry engagements in conventional and emerging areas, such as connectivity, advanced spaceflight, satellite and space launch systems, space sustainability, space tourism and advanced space manufacturing. *—PTI*

PM invites US universities to open campus in India

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

India and the US have agreed to strengthen collaborations between their higher education institutions, facilitate study abroad and explore opportunities for setting up campuses of premier American colleges in India.

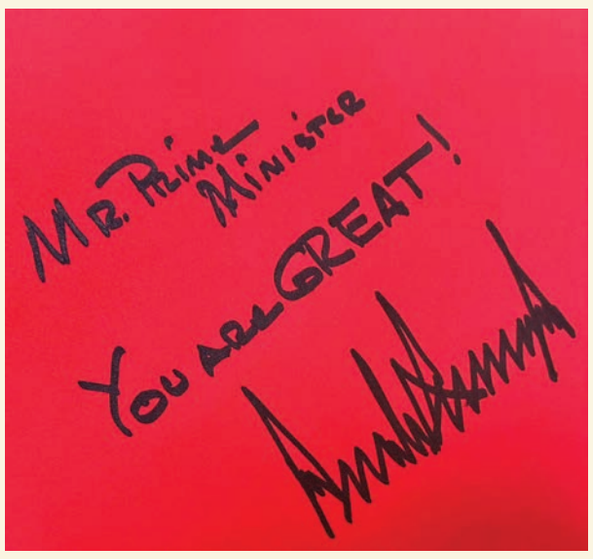
Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump during their wide-ranging talks at the White House on Thursday also recognised that the talent flow and movement of students, researchers and employees, has mutually benefitted both countries.

According to the latest Open Doors Report, the number of Indian students studying in the US in the academic year 2023-24 is at 3,31,602, a rise of 23 per cent from 2022-23 when the number stood at 2,68,923.

Trump and Modi noted the importance of advancing the people-to-people ties between the two countries. In this context, they noted that the more than 300,000-strong Indian student community contributes USD 8 billion annually. *—PTI*

Trump blames Indian reporter's 'accent': 'I can't understand a word'

During a joint press conference with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the White House, US President Donald Trump deflected a question on anti-India activities in the US by blaming the reporter's accent. When the Indian journalist asked about such activities, Trump initially claimed he couldn't hear the question. As the reporter repeated it, Trump responded, "I can't understand a word he's saying," adding that the accent made it difficult for him. The moment, captured on video, has gone viral on social media, sparking reactions over Trump's apparent attempt to sidestep the query. *—Agencies*



US President Donald Trump gifted PM Modi a signed copy of 'Our Journey Together', a photobook chronicling his first term in the White House. He personally signed the book, inscribing: "Mr Prime Minister, you are great" **PHOTO: PTI**

India rules out 3rd-party mediation in China border row

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

> **No one should make China an issue in the relations and cooperation between countries or seek to instigate bloc politics and confrontation**
>
> - Guo Jiakun, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson

India has virtually ruled out any role for a third party in its border dispute with China after US President Donald Trump suggested that he was ready to extend support if it helps in the resolution of the lingering issue.

At a media briefing, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said on Thursday (Friday IST) that New Delhi has always adopted a bilateral approach in dealing with these issues.

As a matter of long-held policy, India has been maintaining that there is no role for any third party in any of its bilateral issues.

"Your question about the offer to mediate between India and China, I think, I suspect you know the answer to this question," he said when asked Trump's offer.

After his talks with Modi, the US president made the offer of support at a media briefing while responding to a question on India's frosty ties with China over the border row. *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Dodge Chief Elon Musk at Blair House, Washington DC, on Friday. They discussed space, mobility, technology, and innovation. The Tesla CEO was accompanied by his partner and Neuralink director, Shivon Zilis. He also had his three children Little X, and the twins he had with-Zilis, Azure, and Strider. Modi also gifted Musk's children three books - 'The Crescent Moon' by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, The Great RK Narayan Collection and Pandit Vishnu Sharma's Panchatantra . Musk in return gifted PM a heat shield from SpaceX's Starship rocket **PHOTO: PTI**

PM silent in India, calls Adani issue 'personal' abroad: RaGa

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

> **Rahul is suffering from obsessive-compulsive neurosis (sic). So, he is obsessed with Adani, Hindenburg and Rafale**
>
> -Ajay Alok, BJP national spokesperson

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "covering up" businessman Gautam Adani's alleged corruption.

In a post on X, he said the prime minister maintains silence when questions are asked in the country and terms it a personal matter when asked abroad.

"If you ask questions in the country, there is silence, If you ask abroad, it is a personal matter!

"Even in America, Modi Ji covered up Adani Ji's corruption!" Gandhi charged in his post in Hindi.

"When filling a friend's pocket is 'nation building' for Modiji, then taking bribes and looting the nation's wealth becomes a 'personal matter'," he also said.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor expressed hope Modi conveyed to Trump that deporting Indians in shackles in a military aircraft was not right and added the two leaders' press conference they had a good meeting. *—PTI*

PM's panel to meet on Monday for next CEC selection

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

A selection committee led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to convene on Monday to decide on the next Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). The committee also includes Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, and Home Minister Amit Shah.

The meeting is crucial as the current CEC, Rajiv Kumar, is due to retire on 18 February. The committee will recommend a candidate from a shortlist prepared by a search committee. Subsequently, the president will appoint the new CEC based on this recommendation.

PHOTO: ANI

Following Kumar's retirement, Gyanesh Kumar is the senior-most election commissioner, with a tenure lasting until 26 January, 2029. Current election commissioner Sukhbir Singh Sandhu is also part of the commission.

In light of recent legislative changes, the process for appointing the CEC has evolved. Previously, the senior-most election commissioner was typically elevated to CEC upon retirement, but a new law enacted last year establishes a search committee to shortlist five secretary-level officials for consideration by the prime minister-led panel.

This law permits the selection committee to recommend candidates outside the initial shortlist. Candidates for both the CEC and the election commissioners must be individuals of integrity with significant knowledge and experience in managing elections, thus allowing serving or retired officials at secretary-level to be appointed. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

BJP has internal tussle over portfolio allocation: Atishi

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Outgoing Chief Minister Atishi of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has voiced concerns regarding internal strife among BJP MLAs concerning portfolio allocations.

During a press conference, she accused the BJP of diverting attention from its unfulfilled election commitments and claimed that party leaders were embroiled in a "tussle" over ministerial positions, primarily to "exploit" public funds.

Atishi further asserted that the BJP shows little inclination towards honouring promises outlined in its election manifesto, alleging that the party plans to shift blame for its shortcomings onto AAP.

"We have learned from our sources that the BJP aims to claim the Delhi government's financial situation is a result of the previous AAP administration," she stated.

Highlighting her party's financial achievements, Atishi noted that Delhi's budget has risen from Rs 31,000 crore in 2014-15 to Rs 77,000 crore in 2024-25 under AAP's governance. "In the past decade, the budget has increased 2.5 times, and we even repaid debts from the Congress administration," she added.

The BJP asserted on Friday that it will soon announce the name of Delhi chief minister and slammed AAP leader Atishi over her claims of power cuts in the city, saying she should observe 13 days of mourning over her party's "death. *—PTI*

NEXT MEET ON 22 FEB

Meeting between farmers, central team held cordially

CHANDIGARH, 14 FEB

A meeting between a Central team led by Union Minister Pralhad Joshi and farmers' representatives to discuss their various demands, including a legal guarantee for MSP on crops, was held here cordially on Friday and the next round of talks has been slated for 22 February.

The meeting comes after a year-long protest by farmers over a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for crops, among other demands.

The Union minister of consumer affairs, food and public distribution will lead a central team to the meeting that will be attended by a 28-member delegation from the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha spearheading the farmers' protest.

Farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on an indefinite fast, said he would also attend the meeting. He will be taken to the meeting venue from the Khanauri protest site in an ambulance.

Punjab Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khuddian along with senior government officials will also be present at the meeting to be held at the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration here, sources said.

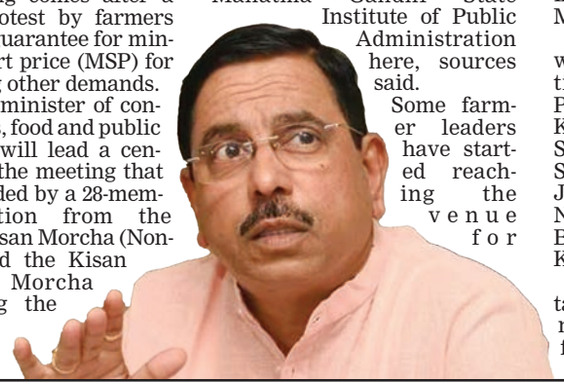
Some farmer leaders have started reaching the venue for the meeting.

Manjit Singh Rai, a farmer leader, said they expect the government to resolve their issues.

Dallewal, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) convenor, has been on an indefinite hunger strike at the Khanauri border point since November 26 to press the Centre on various demands, including a legal guarantee for MSP on crops.

Prominent farmer leaders who will be part of the delegation are Sarwan Singh Pandher, Abhimanyu Kohar, Kaka Singh Kotra, Sukhjit Singh, PR Pandian, Arun Sinha, Lakhwinder Singh, Jaswinder Longowal, MS Rai, Nand Kumar, Balwant Singh Behramke and Inderjit Singh Kotbudha.

Four rounds of meetings had taken place between central ministers and the protesting farmers in February. *—PTI*



India-B'desh border talks next week

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The border forces of India and Bangladesh will hold their bi-annual talks here next week with issues such as border fence construction and attacks on BSF personnel and civilians by Bangladeshi miscreants figuring among the discussion points, an official statement said on Friday.

The 55th Director General-Level Border Coordination Conference between BSF and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) will be organised at the Border Security Force (BSF) headquarters here between February 17-20 February.

This would be the first top-level meeting between the two sides after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in August last year.

The Indian side will be led by BSF Director General (DG) Daljit Singh Chawdhary while the BGB delegation will be headed by Maj General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui.

The conference is being organised to discuss border-related issues and for better coordination between both the border guarding forces, the BSF said in a statement.

Discussions will be held on prevention of attack/assault on BSF personnel and Indian civilians by Bangladesh-based miscreants/nationals, how to prevent trans-border crimes, construction of single row fence, action against Indian Insurgent Groups in Bangladesh, issues related to border infrastructure, joint efforts for effective implementation of Coordinated Border Management Plan, Confidence Building Measures. The 4,096km India-Bangladesh border spans across five states – West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam and Mizoram. The BSF is designated as the lead security and intelligence-gathering agency for this front. *—PTI*

Five militants held from three Manipur districts

IMPHAL, 14 FEB

Five militants belonging to proscribed outfits have been arrested from Manipur's Imphal West, Imphal East and Thoubal districts, police said on Friday. Two active cadres of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (Noyon) were apprehended from Thangmeiband and Keishampat in Imphal West on Thursday, they said. Police also arrested another member of the KCP (Noyon) from Khurai Thoudam Leikai in Imphal East. The arrested militant was "directly involved in extortion activities from the general public, government officials, hospitals, schools and petrol pumps", a police officer said. In another operation, two cadres of KCP (PWG) were arrested from Sangaiyumphal in Thoubal district, he said. Arms and ammunition have also been seized from the arrested militants, the officer said. *—PTI*

NCW summons YouTuber Elvish for 'racist' remarks

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Social media influencer Elvish Yadav has been summoned by the National Commission for Women for allegedly making racist remarks against Miss Arunachal and Bigg Boss contestant Chum Darang, officials said. Yadav has been asked to appear before the NCW on Monday. On 11 February, the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women (APSCW) strongly condemned the "derogatory and racist" remarks made by Yadav against Darang. Yadav, in a podcast with Big Boss 18 contestant Rajat Dalal, had made fun of Darang and allegedly made racist comments against her. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Kin claim woman's uterus removed without consent

THANE, 14 FEB

The kin of a 26-year-old woman who died during childbirth in a civic hospital in Kalyan in Thane district have accused the doctors of removing her uterus without consent, an official said. They have been protesting along with friends at Shastri Nagar Hospital, which is operated by Kalyan Dombivali Municipal Corporation, since Tuesday, he said. Since Tuesday, her kin and friends have been protesting seeking a criminal case against the doctors there, the official said, adding SRPF and police personnel have been deployed outside the hospital to maintain law and order. Shastri Nagar Hospital chief medical officer Dr Kishore Chaudhary said he would comment on the issue only after receiving reports of the Medical Forensic Committee as well as the autopsy report. *—PTI*

No night prayers on Shab-e-Baraat in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, 14 FEB

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has described as "unfortunate" the security establishment's decision to seal Srinagar's historic Jama Masjid on Shab-e-Baraat, one of the holiest nights in the Islamic calendar that was observed across Kashmir. Police on Thursday placed Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, who was scheduled to deliver a sermon at Jama Masjid on Shab-e-Baraat, under house arrest. The people present on the premises were asked to leave and the mosque management was informed that there would be no night prayers. "It is very unfortunate that the security establishment has taken the decision to seal the historic Jamia Masjid, Srinagar, on one of the holiest nights in the Islamic calendar — Shab-e-Baraat," Abdullah posted on X. *—PTI*

Meiteis term Prez rule as undemocratic

Cong says there's a Constitutional crisis that forced imposition of Prez rule in Manipur

IMPHAL, 14 FEB

The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), an umbrella body of several Imphal-based civil society organisations, on Friday termed the imposition of the President's rule in the state as "undemocratic" and "most unfortunate".

The Meitei body also alleged that the President's rule was "a ploy to push the state into further turmoil".

"The sudden and unreasonable imposition of the President's rule in Manipur by the Government of India, despite the BJP having an absolute majority in the state, is seen as a deliberate ploy to push Manipur further into turmoil," the COCOMI alleged in a statement.

The Imphal-based body also claimed, "This move raises serious questions about the central government's true intentions, as it shifts the blame onto the alleged incompetency of its own BJP MLAs rather than addressing the real issues at hand."

The COCOMI also criticised BJP legislators for their failure to choose a new leader.

All eyes are now on the BJP central leadership over its next step in strife-torn Manipur, a day after President's rule was imposed in the northeastern state and the assembly put under suspended animation. Officials said on Friday that security forces were on high alert in state capital Imphal, particularly around the Raj Bhavan and the CM secretariat.

In a post on X, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also said there is a Constitutional crisis in Manipur that forced the imposition of President's rule. Reacting to the development, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said it is a belated admission by the BJP of their complete inability to govern Manipur.

In another post on X, Congress general secretary, Communications, Jairam Ramesh said, "Finally what the Indian National Congress has been demanding for almost 20 months has happened. President's rule has been imposed in Manipur."

Meanwhile, the Manipur CPI(M) unit said the President's rule should be immediately revoked and fresh elections held at the earliest.

CPI(M) state committee secretary Ksh Shanta told reporters that the party, along with other like-minded ones, will stand for Manipur's territorial integrity during President's rule. *—PTI*

Security personnel keep vigil in Imphal after the imposition of President's rule in Manipur on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

'Honest political will' needed for peace in Manipur: Irom Sharmila

KOLKATA, 14 FEB

Rights activist Irom Sharmila has condemned the imposition of President's rule in Manipur as insufficient and a means to evade democratic accountability amid ongoing ethnic violence. In a recent interview, she called for "honest political will" and proposed restoring unity through the titular king of Manipur, while creating mini-assemblies for the Meitei, Naga, and Kuki communities to ensure equitable representation. Sharmila asserted that the government's handling of the situation reflects a disregard for Manipur, contrasting it with responses to violence in larger states. Following Chief Minister N Biren Singh's resignation after months of unrest, she welcomed the change but demanded further decisive action. *—PTI*

UNSAFE AT HOME

Minors sexually assaulted, arrests made in 4 cases

KOLLAM, 14 FEB

A man has been arrested for allegedly raping his 15-year-old daughter on several occasions when her mother was not at home in this south Kerala district, police said on Friday.

An officer of Kulathupuzha police station said that the crime came to light when the girl disclosed it during a counselling session in her school a day ago.

The school informed the police which arrested the father on the same day and booked him for various offences under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the officer said.

Tamil Nadu

Three Class XI students from a government school in Salem, Tamil Nadu, have been arrested for allegedly assaulting a junior student on campus on 22 January. The incident was reported on 5 February after a classmate informed a teacher, who then alerted the principal. However, police noted a delay in action by the school administration.

The victim's uncle later contacted Childline (1098) on 10 February, leading to an inquiry and police intervention.

Maharashtra

A teenage girl from Maharashtra's Palghar district was allegedly repeatedly raped by her brother and uncle, who also forced her to undergo an abortion, an official said on Friday.

In her complaint, the girl said she was sexually assaulted multiple times by her sibling and uncle between October and December last year. When she became pregnant, the uncle took the teenager to a medical facility at Grant Road in Mumbai for an abortion. *—PTI*

Delhi

A 17-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her neighbour in northeast Delhi's Karawal Nagar area, police said on Friday.

She said the accused neighbour called her to a house in Karawal Nagar under the pretence of some work. When she arrived, the accused forced himself on her and raped her.

—PTI WITH AGENCIES

SC to hear Allahbadia's plea against YouTube show remarks

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Supreme Court on Friday said the plea of influencer Ranveer Allahbadia against the FIRs lodged against him over his alleged distasteful comments during a programme on YouTube will be taken up in two-three days.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar told Abhinav Chandrachud, appearing for the influencer, that it does not allow oral mentioning of cases for urgent listing.

"I have assigned the bench and it will come up (before a bench) in two-three days," the CJI said when Chandrachud submitted that the Assam police has summoned Allahbadia for joining the probe during the day.

Podcaster Allahbadia's remarks on parents and sex on comedian Samay Raina's YouTube show 'India's Got Latent' triggered a controversy and several FIRs have been lodged against him and others in various parts of the country. An Assam police team is in Pune to issue summons to Raina in connection with a case filed in the north-eastern state over his now-deleted YouTube show. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

SC stalls arrest of Puja Khedkar till 17 March

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Supreme Court on Friday extended till 17 March protection from arrest to former IAS probationer Puja Khedkar, accused of cheating and wrongly availing OBC and disability quota benefits in the civil services examination.

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma directed Khedkar to cooperate in the investigation.

During the hearing, Additional Solicitor General S V Raju sought rime to file reply in the matter. *—PTI*

SC slams TN body for going easy on Isha

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Supreme Court on Friday slammed the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board for moving after two years against an order that quashed a showcause notice issued against Isha Foundation for allegedly flouting environmental norms. A bench of Justice Surya Kant and Justice N Kotiswar Singh termed the petition filed by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) as a "friendly match" played by bureaucrats wanting the apex court's stamp on the petition's dismissal. The showcause was issued to the foundation for constructing buildings between 2006 and 2014 without reportedly obtaining mandatory environmental clearances but the Madras High Court quashed it. *—PTI*

Man convicted for rape and murder of foreigner

PANAJI, 14 FEB

Nearly eight years after Irish-British national Danielle McLaughin was raped and brutally murdered in Goa, a court on Friday convicted the lone accused in the case, a 31-year-old local resident.

While the prosecution demanded the maximum sentence for the accused Vikat Bhagat, the judge said she would pronounce the quantum of sentence on 17 February.

In a statement, family members of McLaughin – who was 28 years old at the time of her death in 2017 – said they were thankful to everyone who took efforts to ensure justice for her.

Judge Kshama Joshi of the District and Sessions Court at Margao in South Goa found Bhagat guilty of both the offences, said Vikram Varma, the lawyer representing the victim's mother Andrea Brannigan.

The court will pronounce the quantum of sentence on Monday, he said, adding that the public prosecutor demanded the "maximum sentence" for the accused. The maximum sentence in such cases is capital punishment.

"Our thoughts are with the family today. We continue to provide support as required," said the British High Commission in a statement after the verdict. *—PTI*

2 new GBS cases raise M'rashtra tally to 205

PUNE, 14 FEB

The tally of Maharashtra's suspected and confirmed Gullain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) cases has reached 205 with the detection of two more cases, a health official said.

The number of confirmed cases stands at 177, of which 20 patients are on ventilator support, he said on Thursday. The death toll remained unchanged at eight, said the official.

Most of the cases in the state have been reported from Pune.

A 53-year-old man has also died of GBS at a hospital in Mumbai, the first fatality in the city due to the nerve disorder, officials had said earlier.

GBS causes the immune system attack the peripheral nerves, resulting in muscle weakness, loss of sensation in the legs and/or arms, as well as problems swallowing or breathing. *—PTI*

SC seeks opinion on putting politicians under RTI

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Supreme Court on Friday asked the Centre, the Election Commission and six political parties to respond in writing to the pleas seeking to bring them under the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act to ensure accountability and restricting black money during polls.

A bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar was hearing two separate PILs filed by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and lawyer Ashwini Updhyay on the issue.

"We will take it up on a non-miscellaneous day for the final hearing. In the meanwhile, the pleadings have to be complete," the CJI said.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, representing ADR, said his plea was pending for the last 10 years.

The bench asked the litigants to file their written submissions, not exceeding three pages, before the final hearing and posted the hearing in the week of 21 April.

The top court, on 7 July, 2015, issued the notices to the Centre, the EC and six political parties – Congress, BJP, CPI, NCP and BSP – on the plea of the NGO seeking to declare all national and regional political parties "public authorities" to bring them under the RTI.

A similar plea was filed by Upadhyay in 2019 for bringing political parties under RTI to make them accountable and curb use of black money in polls. He had sought direction to the Centre to take steps to deal with the menace of corruption and communalisation.

"Declare the political parties, registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, a 'Public Authority' under Section 2(h) of the Right to Information Act, 2005, to make them transparent and accountable to the people and curb use of black money in elections," it said.

The PIL said, "Direct the election commission to ensure compliance of the Representation of the People Act, Right to Information Act, Income Tax Act and other Election Laws and Rules so for as they relate to Political Parties and de-register them if they fail to comply with the Election Laws and Rules." *—PTI*

STRUGGLE FOR LIVING SPACE

Govt backs 'voluntary' exit from tiger reserves

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Voluntary relocation of villages from core areas of tiger reserves should be carried out on a "priority" to support wildlife conservation and ensure the inclusive growth of people living in forest areas, the NTCA has said.

During a meeting of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), some members also said that the current voluntary village rehabilitation package might not be attractive to all communities living in core and critical tiger habitats and suggested it be revised.

According to the minutes of the latest NTCA meeting, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said green growth should be achieved through mitigation strategies in buffer and corridor areas while core and critical tiger habitats made "inviolate", according to tiger management principles.

Yadav, who is also the NTCA chairman, "emphasised" that "voluntary relocation of villages from core or critical tiger habitats of the tiger reserve, which is backed with statutory provisions, should be taken on a priority so that a win-win situation for tiger conservation and inclusive growth can be achieved and people living inside forest areas can be brought into the mainstream".

He stressed that the needs of forest dwellers should be considered while carrying out voluntary relocations and highlighted the potential of tiger reserves as an "instrument for development of Tier II cities".

Last year, a large number of people from tribal communities living in the core zones of India's tiger reserves protested against the NTCA's directive to forest officials to speed up the relocation of 64,801 families from 591 villages in the core areas of 54 tiger reserves. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Akhara Mahamandaleshwar, 3 others attacked at Kumbh

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 14 FEB

A Mahamandaleshwar of the Kinnar Akhara and three of his disciples were reportedly assaulted by a group of unknown assailants at the Maha Kumbh Mela on Friday. The injured individuals were subsequently admitted to the Central Hospital in Sector 2.

Mahamandaleshwar Kalyani nand Giri recounted, "Last night, as we were leaving the Akhara, over half a dozen young men surrounded our vehicle. They attacked me first with a sharp weapon, and when my disciples intervened, they were also assaulted." Giri noted that after a protracted struggle, they managed to escape, sustaining various injuries in the process.

Shambhu Singh, Station House Officer of Anna Kshetra police station, reported that a formal complaint from the Kinnar Akhara regarding the incident is forthcoming. Initial investigations suggest that the assault may be linked to a longstanding rivalry between two groups within the eunuch community. This follows an earlier attack on a eunuch named Himangi Sakhi, which is also under investigation.

In a separate development, Mamta Kulkarni will continue her role as Kinnar Akhara Mahamandaleshwar after her resignation was not accepted. Kulkarni expressed gratitude for retaining her position following her appointment on 24 January at the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. *—PTI*

ALL IS NOT RIGHT, YET

Demonstrators protest in support of transgender rights outside of the police investigation headquarters in Lima, Peru. In May 2024, the government passed a law that labelled transgender people as mentally ill, but withdrew it a month later after a series of protests
PHOTO: PTI

India won't be spared from Trump's reciprocal tariffs

US President Donald Trump has asserted that Washington will not spare India from reciprocal tariffs.

The President has set in motion his plan to impose reciprocal tariffs on imports, which is expected to further deepen the global trade war.

During 2021-24, the US was India's largest trading partner. During April-November 2024-25, the bilateral trade in goods between the two countries stood at USD 82.52 billion (USD 52.89 billion exports, USD 29.63 imports). The trade gap was USD 23.26 billion which is in the favour of India.

The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total goods exports, 6.22 per cent in imports, and 10.73 per cent in bilateral trade.

Trump has announced a 25 per cent duty on all steel and aluminium imports. It will come into effect from 12 March.

Moody's Ratings have stated that Indian steel producers will face increased challenges in exporting their products following the US decision to impose the 25 per cent tariff.

In international trade parlance, tariffs or customs duties or taxes are imposed on the import of goods. The importer has to pay this duty to the government. Normally, companies pass on these taxes to end users.

For example, if a company is importing a product 'X', having 10 per cent customs duty, valued at Rs 100 from other country, the cost of the product will go up to Rs 110.

These duties, which are indirect taxes, are a source of revenue for a country. Anti-dumping duty, countervailing duty or safeguard duty are also kinds of tariffs.

Normally, both reciprocal and retaliatory tariffs can be used synonymously. They are imposed by countries to match hike in duties or high tariffs by trading partners. For example when in 2018, the US imposed higher duties on certain steel and aluminium products, India retaliated by raising tariffs on 29 US products, recovering equivalent revenue.

US President Donald Trump's has threatened to impose reciprocal tariffs for several countries, including India, which he termed a tariff king
PHOTO: PTI

Tariffs are generally imposed to make imported goods expensive and in turn, promote domestic manufacturing and job creation. It also protects domestic players from cheaper imports.

However, higher import duties are inflationary in nature and make inputs expensive for the domestic industry.

For example, if an auto company needs some component, which is not produced in its country, it will have to pay a higher price for its import because of tariffs.

This will make the product expensive for domestic users.

The US is facing huge trade imbalances with countries, especially with China. With India, the US has a trade deficit of USD 35.31 billion in goods in 2023-24. To bridge this gap, the US President is imposing reciprocal tariffs.

However, the nature and extent of these tariffs are questionable. According to the economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), these are unfair and the US itself imposes high duties on several goods to safeguard its domestic markets.

Citing data from the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) World Tariff Profiles 2023, GTRI has highlighted the significant tariffs the US places on products such as dairy (188 per cent), fruits and vegetables (132 per cent), cereals and food preparations (193 per cent), oilseeds, fats, and oils (164 per cent), and beverages and tobacco (150 per cent).

Other goods, including coffee, tea, cocoa, and spices, face tariffs of 53 per cent, while fish products and chemicals are taxed at 35 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively.

India's average duty rate stands at 17 per cent, which is higher than the US's average rate of 3.3 per cent.

GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava has noted that some countries, including the US, Japan, and South Korea, impose steep tariffs on certain goods, with rates as high as 350 per cent, 457 per cent, and 887 per cent, respectively.

According to WTO norms, member countries are required to submit their tariff schedules which include bound duty rates for all products. The duty imposed by India is in compliance with the WTO norms. However, any duty beyond the bound rates is violative of these rules.

Trader experts are of the opinion that duties imposed by the US are violative of these norms.
—PTI

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SALAR سالار

Hate speech spiked after Musk's X takeover: Study

Hate speech on the social media platform X spiked by almost 50 per cent in the months following Elon Musk's purchase, compared to the months prior, a new analysis has shown.

Researchers, including those from the University of California, Berkeley, also found that the number of bot and bot-like accounts did not decline during the period Musk was CEO, until June 2023.

Previous studies have shown that hate speech increased on X right after the US-based entrepreneur purchased the social media platform -- then known as Twitter -- and became its CEO, with no reduction in bot-driven activity. Musk had pledged to "defeat the spam bots" in a post on X in April 2022.

The findings, published in the journal PLOS One, provide supporting evidence, while also pointing out trends in hate speech and bot accounts throughout Musk's tenure.

Analysing hate speech in the English language and inauthentic activity on X during the period, the researchers found that hate speech spiked just before Musk's purchase, continuing at a weekly rate 50 per cent higher than in the months prior.

"The increase is seen across multiple dimensions of hate, including racism, homophobia, and transphobia," the authors wrote.

Further, the analysis revealed a heightened engagement with hate-related content, with about a 70 per cent increase in the average number of 'likes' on such posts.

Environmentalists active on X dropped by nearly half in six months following Musk's takeover
PHOTO: X

- The analysis also revealed a heightened engagement with hate-related content, with about a 70 per cent increase in the average number of 'likes' on such posts.

Measuring inauthentic accounts on the social media platform, the authors found "no reduction (and a possible increase) in activity by these users after Musk purchased X," pointing to potentially negative outcomes, including scams, interference in elections, and harm to public health campaigns.

Raising concerns about the safety of online platforms, the authors called for increased moderation on X and more research on activity and engagement across social media.

"Overall, the long-term increase in hate speech and the prevalence of potentially inauthentic accounts are concerning, as these factors can undermine safe and democratic online environments and increase the risk of offline harms," they wrote.

A 2023 study, published in August in the journal Trends in Ecology and Evolution, revealed that environmentalists active on X dropped by nearly half in the six months following Musk's takeover, a substantially higher drop-off rate than users discussing general politics on the platform.

The results raised alarm and signified a "substantial loss for the conservation community, which includes ecologists, social scientists, conservation practitioners, policymakers, and other interest groups," researchers, including those from Pomona College, US, wrote.
—PTI

Elon Musk acquired Twitter for $44 billion in 2022
PHOTO: PTI

Myanmar: Renewed conflict dims Rohingya repatriation hopes

Bangladesh has been taking in fellow Muslims from Myanmar's troubled Rakhine state to the southern coastal district of Cox's Bazar, providing food and shelter since a bloody 2017 army crackdown forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims across the border.

Myanmar's military junta has ruled since a coup in February 2021 ousted the democratically elected Aung San Suu Kyi-led civilian government.

Since then, Myanmar has been rocked by fighting between numerous ethnic rebel groups and the military.

The Arakan Army (AA) rebel group — which is fighting the ruling junta for control of Myanmar's western borderlands — wants more autonomy for the ethnic Rakhine people, a population that is also accused of aiding the military in their expulsion of the Rohingya.

The AA is the well-armed military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority that seeks autonomy from Myanmar's central government. It has been attacking army outposts in Rakhine state since November 2023.

Roshid Ahmad, who fled Myanmar's fighting, is grateful for being "one of those who made it out alive."

The 21-year-old Rohingya from Rakhine's Maungdaw township got a boat to Bangladesh with his mother and brother in December 2024.

"Not every Rohingya gets to flee Myanmar in one piece, let alone with their loved ones," he told DW in a video call from a Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar.

"The Arakan Army rebels are forcibly taking away Rohingya young men from villages, conscripting and making them fight against the Myanmar Military. Many of the abducted Rohingya have disappeared without any trace. Starvation and untreated diseases are killing the Rohingya in Rakhine," Ahmad claimed, adding that, "I don't believe Rohingya can ever go back."

Last year, both the junta and the AA began forcibly recruiting Rohingya youths, reported Human Rights Watch.

Several Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh recently told DW about how their community had suffered in Myanmar.

Jawad Alom, who fled to Bangladesh in September along with his four brothers and cousins, as well as their families, accused multiple AA rebels of gang raping his sister-in-law.

"The AA men raided our village in Buthidaung, aiming to abduct some Rohingya men. My brother and I slipped out of the village," Alom told DW. Alom said they returned to their village after the rebels had left, only to find they "had gang-raped at least half a dozen Rohingya women, including my brother's wife."

Estimates by the Bangladesh government say that over 65,000 Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh since the end of 2023, while other estimates put that number near 80,000
PHOTO: PTI

"When we left our village for Bangladesh, on the way we found scores of bodies floating on roadside ponds," Alom claimed.

"They looked like Rohingya men, apparently executed by AA rebels. They sometimes killed Rohingya who resisted against their attempts of abduction or conscription."

According to a recent estimate by the Bangladesh government, over 65,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh since the end of 2023. Other estimates put the figures as high as 80,000. Several attempts in the past years to repatriate Rohingya failed, as many refused to return home due to insecurity.

Refugee experts say that although repatriation with dignity and rights would be the ideal option, there is no hope for it in the near future.

Canada-based refugee resettlement expert Mohammad Zaman noted that the military has "remained repressive and carried out a second, or some say, even a third wave of genocide" against the Rohingya people.

"That is no right environment to return to," Zaman told DW. "Even though the AA controls a large part of northern Rakhine State, displaced people can't trust them due to atrocities committed in the process. This is an issue as political as it is humanitarian. The resolution wouldn't be easy." Zaman added that the inaction of the international community in terms of the latest genocide is "deplorable."

Khalilur Rahman, high representative on Rohingya issues for Muhammad Yunus, Bangladesh's interim government leader, told DW that his country stands ready to support the efforts of the United Nations system to provide humanitarian and livelihood assistance to the people of Rakhine.

"However, this can be done only if conflict and violence, air strikes and bombings, and widespread violations of the human rights of Rohingyas are ended," he said. "Moreover, aid providers and recipients should have unimpeded access and be free from any violence, displacement, discrimination, intimidation, and harassment."

If these conditions are met, said Rahman, it will create enabling circumstances on the ground for "voluntary, safe, and dignified return of the forcibly displaced Rohingyas from Bangladesh to Rakhine."

Rohingya human rights activist Htway Lwin said that besides the varied forms of violence against the Rohingya, the AA also denies their identity as natives of Myanmar.

"While we maintain our dream of returning to our ancestral lands, we cannot accept any repatriation process that would expose us to further harm," Lwin told DW.

"The Bangladesh and the international community must ensure that repatriation is not a forced process into continued statelessness, but one based on legal recognition, accountability, and structural protections." Lwin concluded. "Without these guarantees, return risks becoming yet another cycle of genocide and dispossession."
—DW News

PHOTO: X

Taiwan vows to invest more in US after new tariffs

TAIPEI, 14 FEB

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said on Friday he would communicate more with the US over President Donald Trump's concerns over the chip industry and invest more in the US, hours after Trump ordered reciprocal tariffs on trade partners. Trump said on Thursday that Taiwan had taken away the US chip business and said that he wanted it back in the country. Taiwan's TSMC is the world's largest chipmaker and produces chips for companies including Apple, Intel and Nvidia. In a news briefing at the presidential office, Lai said that he was aware of Trump's concerns. He described Taiwan's semiconductor industry as well as the global semiconductor industry as part of an "ecosystem" in which countries specialise in different areas. *—PTI*

6 killed in fire at South Korean construction site

SEOUL, 14 FEB

A fire broke out at a resort construction site in the South Korean city of Busan on Friday, killing at least six people, fire officials said. About 100 workers managed to evacuate from the site and about 90 firefighters were trying to put out the blaze, which was reported at around 10.20am, according to Busan's fire agency. It wasn't immediately clear whether workers were still trapped inside. The agency said six people were taken to hospitals in cardiac arrest and later pronounced dead. Seven other people sustained minor injuries. Television footage showed gray-black smoke and flames rising from the site and a helicopter approaching the building as part of rescue efforts. The cause of the fire wasn't immediately clear. *—PTI*

Indian-origin man jailed for threat to ex S'pore Prez

SINGAPORE, 14 FEB

An Indian-origin Singaporean was sentenced to 10 months and 12 weeks' jail after he pleaded guilty to three harassment charges such as an Instagram post on then President Halimah Yacob "deserves to be dragged out" and killed. Vickreman Harvey Chettiar, 34, pleaded guilty on 12 February. He also admitted to one count of fabricating false evidence. Fourteen other charges, including multiple counts of harassment, were considered during his sentencing, reported The Straits Times on Friday. He was out on bail for offences including harassment when he said in an Instagram story on April 30, 2023 that then President Halimah Yacob "deserves to be dragged out" and killed. Vickreman published the social media post as he felt aggrieved over the executions of drug traffickers. *—PTI*

Cyclone Zelia makes landfall in Western Australia

SYDNEY, 14 FEB

Severe Tropical Cyclone Zelia hit Australia's west coast on Friday and brought "very destructive" winds of up to 290 kph and heavy rains sparking concerns of flash floods. The eye of the storm crossed and hit the Australian coast just after 12 pm. "This is a very dangerous system that will cause significant impact and is causing impacts as we speak," Australian Bureau of Meteorology's Matthew Collopy said. The eye of the storm, however, passed east of Port Hedland because of which the area could avoid a storm surge, Collopy said. Zelia was strongest at Category 5 at the time of landfall east of Port Hedland, which is one of the world's busiest iron ore ports, according to the bureau. *—DW News*

Trump eyes summit with Xi and Putin

US president says he wants to cut nukes and halve military budgets of all three countries

WASHINGTON DC, 14 FEB

US President Donald Trump has proposed talks with China and Russia to discuss reducing all three countries' nuclear stockpiles and slashing their defence budgets in half.

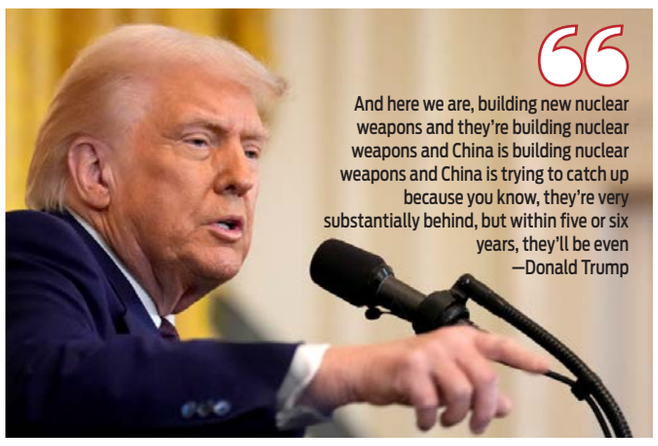
Trump said he hoped to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin "when things calm down".

Trump said that there was "no reason" to build new nuclear weapons when Washington's existing arsenal could destroy the world "100 times over" and public funds could be spent on "other things that are actually hopefully much more productive".

Speaking a day after discussing negotiations to end the war in Ukraine in a phone call with Putin, Trump said he and the Russian leader had agreed to pursue arms reduction "in a very big way".

"And here we are, building new nuclear weapons and they're building nuclear weapons and China is building nuclear weapons and China is trying to catch up because you know, they're very substantially behind, but within five or six years, they'll be even," Trump said.

He said it would be a "sad day" if the US needed to use its nuclear weapons. "That's going to be probably oblivion," he said. *—Agencies*


And here we are, building new nuclear weapons and they're building nuclear weapons and China is building nuclear weapons and China is trying to catch up because you know, they're very substantially behind, but within five or six years, they'll be even
—Donald Trump

Trump says it would be a sad day if the US ever needed to use its nuclear weapons **PHOTO: PTI**

Trump Jr backs 'Steroid Olympics'

WASHINGTON, 14 FEB

The 1789 Capital, led by Donald Trump Jr is infusing funding and some political muscle into the Enhanced Games, a sports festival that would hold track, swimming and other events free of anti-doping or steroid moves.

Enhanced Games founder Aron D'Souza said it would be "double digit millions" to the project. *—PTI*

US AGs gang up against Musk, DOGE's authority

WASHINGTON DC, 14 FEB

Attorneys generals from 14 American states have filed a lawsuit to challenge the authority of billionaire Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to prevent it from putting hundreds of federal officials on leave and gaining access to sensitive federal payment systems.

The suit says the newly formed government department is exercising "virtually unchecked power" and argues that the actions taken by Musk at the helm of DOGE can only be taken by a nominated and Senate-confirmed official.

"We are asking the court to invalidate his directives and actions and to issue a restraining order," Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel said during an online news conference alongside attorneys general from Arizona and New Mexico.

The attorneys general said the court should bar Musk from issuing orders to anyone in the executive branch outside DOGE and declare that his actions have no legal effect.

They also asked the court to order Musk to identify ways that "any data obtained through unlawful agency access was used", destroy "such unauthorized access in his or DOGE's possession" and bar Musk and DOGE from ordering changes in the disbursement of public funds. *—Agencies*

Judge orders US to resume foreign aid

A US court has ordered the government to temporarily lift a three-week funding freeze on US aid and development programmes worldwide. Judge Amir Ali issued the order on Thursday in a lawsuit brought by two health organisations. The ruling is the first to temporarily roll back a Trump freeze on foreign assistance. *—PTI*

Snag stalls Rubio's Munich visit

An Air Force plane carrying Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Jim Risch to Germany to the Munich Security Conference was forced to return to Washington late Thursday after developing a mechanical issue, State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said. *—PTI*

Mexico threatens to sue Google

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said on Thursday that her government wouldn't rule out filing a civil lawsuit against Google if calls the stretch of sea between northeastern Mexico and the southeastern United States the "Gulf of America" – an area long named the Gulf of Mexico across the world. *—PTI*

Vaccine skeptic is US health chief

Robert F Kennedy Jr was sworn in on Thursday as President Trump's health secretary after a close Senate vote, putting the prominent vaccine skeptic in control of USD1.7 trillion in federal spending, vaccine recommendations and food safety, as well as health insurance programmes, for roughly half the country. *—PTI*

US probationary staff get the sack

The Trump administration has intensified its sweeping efforts to shrink the size of the federal workforce, the US' largest employer, by ordering agencies to lay off nearly all probationary employees who had not yet gained civil service protection – potentially affecting hundreds of thousands of workers. *—PTI*

TikTok returns to app stores in US

TikTok has returned to the app stores of Apple and Google in the US, after President Donald Trump delayed the enforcement of a TikTok ban. The app by Chinese technology firm ByteDance was removed from Apple and Google's app stores on 18 January to comply with a law to divest it. *—PTI*

Eyes on Ukraine fate as Vance, Zelenskyy meet

Vance WILL meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday

MUNICH, 14 FEB

Vice President JD Vance will lead the US delegation to the Munich Security Conference that starts on Friday in the southern German city, where world leaders and diplomats are gathering amid intense concern and uncertainty over the Trump administration's foreign policy.

The future of Ukraine will be the top item on the agenda following a phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian leader Vladimir Putin this week, when they pledged to work together to end the 3-year-old Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Vance is expected to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday for talks that many – particularly in Europe – hope will shed at least some light on Trump's ideas for a negotiated settlement to the war.

Hours before the meeting was set to take place, a Russian drone with a high-explosive warhead hit the protective confinement shell of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Kyiv region. Radiation levels have not increased, Zelenskyy and the U.N. atomic agency said.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio was supposed to join Vance and Zelenskyy but was delayed when his Air Force plane had to return to Washington after developing a mechanical problem en route to Munich. The State Department spokeswoman said he would take a different aircraft. *—PTI*

Russian drone hits Ukraine's nuclear plant

KYIV, 14 FEB

A Russian drone with a high-explosive warhead hit the protective shell of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Kyiv in the night, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Friday. Radiation levels have not increased, Zelenskyy and the UN atomic agency said. Zelenskyy said the strike damaged the structure and started a fire, which has been put out.

Meanwhile, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied Ukrainian claims.

"There is no talk about striking on nuclear infrastructure, nuclear energy facilities, any such claim isn't true, our military doesn't do that," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. *—PTI*

UAE delivers 10 aid convoys to Gaza

GAZA, 14 FEB

Ten convoys carrying humanitarian aid from the UAE, a generous contribution from Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, the "Mother of the Nation," Chairwoman of the General Women's Union, President of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood, and Supreme Chairwoman of the Family Development Foundation, have entered the Gaza Strip via the Egyptian Rafah crossing.

The delivery is part of the UAE's commitment to support and provid relief to the Palestinian people.

The convoys comprise 175 trucks carrying over 2,400 tonnes of humanitarian aid, including food supplies, medical provisions, children's nutritional supplements, dates, shelter tents, clothing, and other essential items.

This latest delivery brings the total number of aid convoys entering Gaza under Operation Chivalrous Knight 3 to 175. These convoys have played a significant role in mitigating the difficult conditions faced by Gaza residents, easing hardship for the most vulnerable populations, and ensuring access to basic necessities.

The UAE remains steadfast in its humanitarian support for the Palestinian people in Gaza, working to alleviate the challenging circumstances they endure, reduce the suffering of the most vulnerable, and provide for their essential needs. *— ANI*

The delivery is part of the UAE's commitment to support and provide relief to the Palestinian people

SINGAPORE DENIED ENTRIES TO 33,100 FOREIGNERS IN 2024

SINGAPORE, 14 FEB

Singapore denied entry to 33,100 foreigners in 2024 after they were found to pose immigration or security risks to the city state, the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) said on Friday.

This was 4,500 more than the 28,600 foreigners refused entry in 2023, added ICA which handled more than 230 million travellers at checkpoints last year, 38 million more than in the year before that.

The ICA said those denied entry were either assessed to potentially overstay or work illegally, or commit crimes in the island state. It said the jump in annual visitors was largely due to an increase at Singapore's land checkpoints, accounting for more than 75 per cent of all travellers.

For example, more than 562,000 land crossings in a single day were logged on 20 December, 2024 at the Tuas and Woodlands checkpoints, the two bridge-causeway links to Peninsular Malaysia. — *PTI*

UNITED IN HOPE

Palestinians perform Friday prayers on Friday at the Great Omari Mosque, which was damaged during the Israeli military's air and ground operations in Gaza City during the war **PHOTO: PTI**

CONED INTO CRIME

260 Myanmar scam centre captives saved

BANGKOK, 14 FEB

Some 260 people, including from India, believed to have been trafficked and trapped into working in online scam centres are to be repatriated after they were rescued from Myanmar, Thailand's army announced on Thursday.

In a fresh crackdown on scam centres operating from Southeast Asia, the Thai army said it was coordinating an effort to repatriate some 260 people believed to have been victims of human trafficking after they were rescued and sent from Myanmar to Thailand.

Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, which share borders with Thailand, have become known as havens for criminal syndicates who are estimated to have forced hundreds of thousands of people in Southeast Asia and elsewhere into helping run online scams including false romantic ploys, bogus investment pitches and illegal gambling schemes.

Such scams have extracted tens of billions of dollars from victims around the world, according to UN experts, while the people recruited to carry them out have often been tricked into taking the jobs under false pretenses and trapped in virtual slavery.

An earlier crackdown on scam centres in Myanmar was initiated in late 2023 after China expressed embarrassment and concern over illegal casinos and scam operations in Myanmar's northern Shan state along its border. Ethnic guerrilla groups with close ties to Beijing shut down many operations, and an estimated 45,000 Chinese nationals suspected of involvement were repatriated. *—PTI*

More than 260 people were rescued from online scam centers in Myanmar and handed over to Thailand **PHOTO: X**

9 killed in Pak bomb blast

ISLAMABAD, 14 FEB

Nine people were killed and seven injured when a roadside bomb struck a vehicle carrying coal miners in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province on Friday, officials said.

The blast hit a mini truck in the Shahrag area of Harnai district of the province, said Harnai Deputy Commissioner Hazrat Wali Kakar. He said the victims worked in the coal mines and they were shifted to a nearby hospital.

Initial reports showed it was an improvised explosive device planted on the roadside. Officials of law enforcement agencies rushed to the place and launched a manhunt to nab the culprits. Balochistan government spokesperson Shahid Rand expressed grief over the tragic incident, stating that an investigation had been launched. *—PTI*

Volunteers carry an injured coal miner to a hospital in Quetta, Pakistan, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Gold zooms past record Rs 89k-mark, silver rallies Rs 2K

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Gold prices soared by Rs 1,300 to hit an all-time high of Rs 89,400 per 10 grams amid heavy buying from jewellers and retailers, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 88,100 per 10 grams on Thursday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed by Rs 1,300 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 89,000 per 10 grams against the previous close of Rs 87,700 per 10 grams. Silver also rallied by Rs 2,000 to hit a four-month high of Rs 1 lakh per kg on Friday. The metal had finished at Rs 98,000 per kg on Thursday. —*PTI*

PHOTO:PIXABAY

Rupee rises 12 paise to close at 86.81 against US dollar

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The rupee extended its recovery and settled 12 paise higher at 86.81 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday amid easing American currency. However, higher crude oil prices and incessant selling of domestic equities by foreign institutional investors capped a sharp gain in the local unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.86 and touched the high of 86.79 against the greenback during intraday. It also touched the low of 86.90 before ending the session at 86.81 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a gain of 12 paise from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee settled almost flat with a marginal gain of 2 paise at 86.93 against the US dollar. —*PTI*

Tata Sons' Chief honoured with UK knighthood

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

N Chandrasekaran, Chairman of Tata Sons, has been honoured with an honorary knighthood by the United Kingdom for his contributions to UK-India business relations. He received "The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (Civil Division) - honorary DBE/KBE" from His Majesty, King Charles. In a statement, Chandrasekaran expressed pride in the Tata Group's strong ties with the UK, highlighting their operations across various sectors and notable brands like Jaguar Land Rover and Tetley. He acknowledged the group's employment of over 70,000 people in the UK and lauded collaborations with esteemed institutions such as the University of Oxford and the London School of Economics. Chandrasekaran conveyed gratitude to the UK Government for their continued support and expressed eagerness to strengthen the partnership further. —*PTI*

Govt invites applications for NFRA members

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The government is inviting applications for the positions of chairperson and three full-time members of the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA), an independent body that regulates financial reporting and auditing standards in India. Candidates for the chairperson role must possess at least 25 years of experience in accountancy, auditing, finance, or law, while full-time members should have a minimum of 20 years in these fields. The chairperson will receive a consolidated monthly salary of Rs 5.62 lakh, and full-time members can choose between Rs 5 lakh or the salary of an additional secretary. Applications must be submitted to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs by 3 March, with the possibility of re-appointment after a three-year term. —*PTI*

Wholesale price inflation eases to 2.31% in Jan

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Inflation in vegetables came down significantly to 8.35%, as against 28.65 per cent in December PHOTO: ANI

Wholesale price inflation moderated marginally to 2.31 per cent in January due to the decline in prices of food items especially vegetables, government data released on Friday showed.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) based inflation was 2.37 per cent in December 2024. It was 0.33 per cent in January 2024.

As per the data, inflation in food items eased to 5.88 per cent in January, as against 8.47 per cent in December 2024. Inflation in vegetables came down significantly to 8.35 per cent, as against 28.65 per cent in December 2024.

In the eggs, meat and fish category inflation declined to 3.56 per cent as against 5.43 per cent last month.

Within vegetables, tomato prices declined to 18.9 per cent while inflation in potato continued to be high at 74.28 per cent, and in onion it spiked to 28.33 per cent in January.

The fuel and power category witnessed a deflation of 2.78 per cent in January, against a deflation of 3.79 per cent in December. In manufactured items, inflation was 2.51 per cent as compared to 2.14 per cent in December 2024.

Retail inflation data released on Wednesday showed that Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation eased to a 5-month low of 4.31 per cent in January on easing prices of food items.

ICRA Senior Economist Rahul Agrawal said, "We project the WPI to average at 2.4 per cent in FY2025 and inch up further to 3 per cent in FY2026, despite expectations of a cooling in the prints for the food segment".

However, there are headwinds as far as global commodity prices are concerned. Their prices have been hardening amid growing uncertainty around the impact of the US protectionist trade policies. This would exert an upward pressure on the WPI non-food component.

Besides, rupee depreciation would make imports costlier raising the risk of imported inflation.

The rupee has depreciated about 4 per cent against the US dollar so far in the second half of the current financial year.

Earlier this month, RBI slashed the policy rate by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent in a bid to promote consumption. The rate cut happened after a gap of 5 years. RBI had last reduced the rate in May 2022.

The monetary policy action in April 2025 monetary policy is dependent on factors, including currency movement and liquidity in the system, Paras Jasrai, Senior Economic Analyst India Ratings and Research said. —*PTI*

Investors suffer loss of Rs 25.31 lakh cr in 8 days

Sensex drops 199.76 points; Nifty declines 102.15 points

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

BSE-listed firms dropped to Rs 4,00,19,247 crore in 8 days PHOTO: PTI

Investors' wealth eroded sharply by Rs 25.31 lakh crore in eight days of market crash wherein the BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled over 3 per cent amid concerns over unabated foreign fund outflows, lower-than-expected quarterly earnings and uncertainty over global trade war.

In eight trading days, the BSE benchmark tanked 2,644.6 points or 3.36 per cent, and the NSE Nifty slumped 810 points or 3.41 per cent.

On Friday, the 30-share BSE bellwether gauge dropped 199.76 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 75,939.21, registering its eighth day of decline.

Tracking an extremely weak trend in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms dropped by Rs 25,31,579.11 crore to Rs 4,00,19,247 crore (USD 4.61 trillion) in eight days.

US President Donald Trump has asserted that Washington will not spare India from reciprocal tariffs.

The President has set in motion his plan to impose reciprocal tariffs on imports, which is expected to further deepen the global trade war.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports dropped over 4 per cent. UltraTech Cement, Sun Pharma, IndusInd Bank, NTPC and Tata Steel were also among the laggards.

Nestle, ICICI Bank, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services and HCL Tech were among the gainers.

Among BSE sectoral indices, services plunged 3.16 per cent, industrials (3.03 per cent), capital goods (2.76 per cent), power (2.65 per cent), utilities (2.52 per cent), consumer durables (2.39 per cent), commodities (2.25 per cent) and realty (2.03 per cent). —*PTI*

GTRI OPINES

'US reciprocal tariffs won't hit India much'

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has suggested that the US government's plan to impose reciprocal tariffs in response to higher duties from trading partners is unlikely to significantly affect India. The think tank's founder, Ajay Srivastava, highlighted the distinct export profiles of the two nations, noting that India does not export pistachios, a product that would incur a 50 per cent reciprocal tariff if levied by the US.

Moreover, GTRI reported that for 75 per cent of US exports to India, the average tariff is below 5 per cent, contrasting with India's exposure to high US tariffs on many labour-intensive goods, such as textiles and footwear, which range from 15 to 35 per cent.

Srivastava indicated that India might bide its time until the US announces its decision on reciprocal tariffs in April, before responding in kind as it did in June 2019.

Following discussions between US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it was agreed that India would increase its imports of oil, gas, and military hardware from the US to address trade imbalances.

The GTRI also pointed out the ambiguity surrounding whether the reciprocal tariffs will affect specific products or entire sectors. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Indian firms unite to tackle SA's water crisis

JOHANNESBURG, 14 FEB

Two South African companies with close ties to India have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at addressing the country's pressing water and energy challenges.

Imbanita Consulting and Engineering Services, a joint venture between Imbani Holdings and Tata Africa, partnered with ION Exchange's local subsidiary, renowned for its comprehensive water and environmental management solutions.

The agreement was formalised at the Indian Consulate in Johannesburg on 13 February.

Bish Chakraborty, CEO of Imbanita, stated that the company is well-positioned to alleviate South Africa's persistent load-shedding woes, which have significantly impacted the nation's economy. "We can assist in reducing the duration and frequency of power cuts that have plagued the country for years," he asserted.

Gourish Chakravorty, CEO of Ion Exchange Safic, highlighted his company's extensive experience in tackling water issues in South Africa over the last 17 years, drawing on practical lessons learned from India's own struggles with power supply and water availability decades ago.—*PTI*

India issues new rules for frozen duck meat imports

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Indian government has introduced new guidelines for obtaining an import licence for premium frozen duck meat.

According to a trade notice issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), importers can secure authorisation from the directorate, provided they submit an undertaking confirming that the imported products will be supplied exclusively to hotels rated 3 stars and above, as recognised by the Ministry of Tourism.

Direct imports of this meat are permitted for 3-star hotels without the need for authorisation.

However, importers acting as distributors, aggregators, or suppliers must keep detailed records of all deliveries made to eligible hotels. For future import authorisations, evidence of prior supplies, including GST invoices, must be presented. —*PTI*

FREEZES WITHDRAWALS

RBI imposes curbs on New India Co-op Bank

MUMBAI, 14 FEB

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday issued a notice imposing restrictions on New India Co-operative Bank Limited, Mumbai, barring it from carrying out financial operations without prior approval.

"It is hereby notified for information of the public that...the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) ...has issued certain Directions to New India Co-operative Bank Limited, Mumbai ("the bank"), whereby, as from the close of business on February 13, 2025, the bank shall not, without prior approval of RBI in writing, grant or renew any loans and advances, make any investment, incur any liability including borrowal of funds and acceptance of fresh deposits, disburse or agree to disburse any payment whether in the discharge of its liabilities," the RBI notice read.

According to the RBI notice, "Considering the bank's present liquidity position Bank has been directed not to allow withdrawal of any amount from savings bank or current accounts or any other account of a depositor but is allowed to set off loans against deposits subject to the conditions stated in the RBI Directions."

The Central bank further directed that depositors would be entitled to receive deposit insurance claim amount of their deposits up to a monetary ceiling of Rs 5,00,000 in the same capacity and in the same right, from the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation. —*ANI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Tea growers seek minimum price for their produce

KOLKATA, 14 FEB

Tea growers across the country have advocated minimum sustainable price for their produce to secure viability of the industry which employs lakhs of people.

Indian Tea Association (ITA), in a statement, said both big and small producers have felt the need to arrive at a minimum sustainable price.

The association said that tea cultivation is primarily an agricultural operation and is subject to various challenges namely climate change.

ITA said that the industry is committed to promoting the production of the best quality teas, which are "compliant to all laid down norms". —*PTI*

3 LAKH HOURS OF ENTERTAINMENT

JioStar launches JioHotstar; merges JioCinema, Disney+ Hotstar

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

JioStar, the newly formed joint venture by the merger of Viacom18 and Star India, on Friday announced the launch of JioHotstar by bringing together JioCinema and Disney+ Hotstar streaming platforms.

With close to 3 lakh hours of entertainment, live sports coverage, and more than 50 crore users, JioHotstar provides compelling subscription plans tailored to diverse audience needs, starting at Rs 149, the company said in a statement.

Existing JioCinema and Disney+ Hotstar subscribers will be able to seamlessly transition and set up their JioHotstar subscriptions, it added.

"At the core of JioHotstar is a powerful vision -- to make premium entertainment truly accessible to all Indians. Our promise of 'Infinite Possibilities' ensures that entertainment is no longer a privilege, but a shared experience for all," JioStar CEO - Digital, Kiran Mani said.

Mani further said, "By integrating AI-driven recommendations and offering streaming in over 19 languages, we are personalising content like never before."

JioHotstar will offer the best of Hollywood, with Disney, NBCUniversal Peacock, Warner Bros. Discovery HBO, and Paramount - all on the same platform, the company said.

It will also stream premier tournaments like ICC events, IPL, and WPL, while also spotlighting grassroots cricket with the Indian Street Premier League and events from BCCI, ICC, and state associations, other sporting events including the Premier League and Wimbledon, and domestic leagues such as Pro Kabaddi and ISL. —*PTI*

No more free IPL streaming

Cricket fans will have to pay to watch the Indian Premier League (IPL) in 2025 as JioHotstar ends free streaming. The newly launched platform, formed after the merger of JioCinema and Disney+ Hotstar under Viacom18 and Star India, now operates on a hybrid subscription model. JioCinema had streamed IPL for free since 2023 after securing digital rights for $3 billion. However, JioHotstar will now allow only a few minutes of free match viewing before requiring a subscription. This move has disappointed fans who enjoyed free access over the past two years.

Subscription Plans:

Mobile Plan	₹149/3 months	₹499/Yr (720p, 1 Device)
Super Plan	₹299/3 months	₹899/Yr (1080p, 2 Devices)
Premium Plan	₹499/3 months	₹1499/Yr (4K UHD, 4 Devices)

Limited Free IPL Access – Only a few minutes free per match before requiring a subscription

JioCinema & Disney+ Hotstar Merge to Form JioHotstar

- New streaming giant: Viacom18 & Star India unite.
- 3 lakh+ hours of content: Movies, TV shows & live sports.
- 50+ crore users catered.
- Ads only on LIVE content.

Special access: Hotstar Specials, Disney+ Originals, Latest movie premieres, HBO, Peacock, Paramount+, Marvel, Pixar, Star Wars and National Geographic.

JioHotstar

It's curtains down on National Games

Govt says India ready to host the Olympics in 2036; Meghalaya to host next National Games

HALDWANI, 14 FEB

The closing ceremony of the 38th National Games began here on Friday with home minister Amit Shah as its guest of honour asserting that the country is well on track to host a successful Olympics in 2036.

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president PT Usha declared the Games closed before handing over the flag to Conrad Sangma, chief minister of Meghalaya, the state that will host the next edition of the Games. "I can say it today that India has a very bright future in sports. We are ready to host the Olympics in 2036," Shah said in his address referring to India's bid to host the Olympics in 2036 that is still in early stages.

Along with Shah, sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya also joined the event to laud the athletes' performances over the last two weeks.

The venue has a capacity of 25,000 and was packed for the ceremony.

At the end of it, traditional powerhouse Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) topped the medal tally for the fifth time in the last six games, with a total haul of 121 medals (68 gold, 26 silver, 27 bronze).

Maharashtra won more medals than Services with 198 (54 gold, 71 silver, 73 bronze) but the lesser gold count meant that it ended at second spot.

—PTI

MEDAL TALLY

No	State/Union Territory/Team	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	Services Sports Control Board	68	26	27	121
2	Maharashtra	54	71	76	201
3	Haryana	48	47	58	153
4	Madhya Pradesh	34	26	22	82
5	Karnataka	34	18	28	80
6	Tamil Nadu	27	30	35	92
7	Uttarakhand	24	35	44	103
8	West Bengal	16	13	18	47
9	Punjab	15	20	31	66
10	Delhi	15	18	29	62

Sawan Barwal
Himachal Pradesh
5000M race
13:43:93 Seconds

Sachin Yadav
Uttar Pradesh
Javelin throw
84.39 metres

Jyothi Yarraji
Andhra Pradesh
100M hurdles
13.10 Seconds

Dhinid Desinghu
Karnataka
400M freestyle
14:24.60

Aishwarya Mishra
Maharashtra
400M race
51.12 Seconds

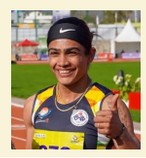


PHOTO:X

Swiatek beats Rybakina to reach Qatar Open SFs

DOHA, 14 FEB

Three-time defending champion Iga Swiatek reached the Qatar Open semifinals by beating Elena Rybakina 6-2, 7-5 on Thursday. Swiatek will face Jelena Ostapenko, who beat Ons Jabeur 6-2, 6-2, for a spot in the final. Rybakina began the year with a 4-2 advantage head-to-head against Swiatek, but now they are tied. Ekaterina Alexandrova continued her winning run by eliminating sixth-seeded Jessica Pegula 4-6, 6-1, 6-1. The Russian, who is ranked 26th, defeated top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka earlier this week. Alexandrova will face another American player in the semifinals. Amanda Anisimova beat Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine 4-6, 7-5, 6-4 to advance. *—PTI*

Olympic silver medalist Koki suspended for doping

MONACO, 14 FEB

Japanese race walker Koki Ikeda, a former Olympic silver medalist, has been banned for four years for doping, the Athletic Integrity Unit said Friday. The athletics watchdog said that a disciplinary and appeals tribunal ruled that the 26-year-old Ikeda had broken anti-doping rules. Ikeda has been provisionally banned from competition since November 2024, with his results disqualified since June 2023. Doping authorities say abnormalities were detected in his blood samples taken in June, August and September of 2023. The AIU alleged the abnormalities "were indicative of blood manipulation." Ikeda won silver at the 2012 Tokyo Olympics and silver at the 2022 world championships. *—PTI*

PHOTO:ANI

Sachin leads India in International Masters League

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Cricketing icons Sachin Tendulkar and Kumar Sangakkara are set to take to the field once again as captains of India and Sri Lanka in the inaugural International Masters League. The tournament will take place from 22 to March 16 February, with matches held across Mumbai, Vadodara, and Raipur. The Indian Masters squad unveiled on Friday boasts several renowned names, including World Cup champions Yuvraj Singh, Suresh Raina, Irfan Pathan, and Ambati Rayudu. Tendulkar expressed his excitement about participating in the league and confirmed he has resumed training in preparation for the event. *—PTI*

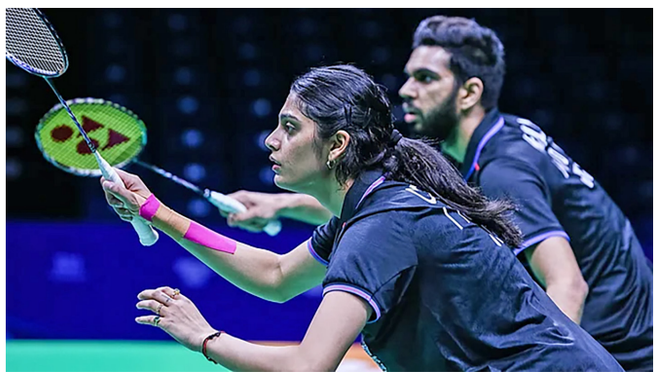
Govt dismisses idea of cricketers shifting to baseball

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

The Sports Ministry has rejected speculation that it would consider harnessing the country's massive pool of aspiring cricketers to turn them into baseball medal prospects at the Asian Games or Olympics, saying that such an idea has never been discussed or considered at any level. A ministry source said that suggestions that this came up for discussion at the Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) meeting earlier this week are "wrong", pointing out that baseball is not even a recognised national federation at this point. "This is completely imaginary. Baseball is not even recognised by the ministry. Why will SAI (Sports Authority of India) get into cricket or turning cricket players into baseball players?" a senior ministry source said. *—PTI*

ASIA MIXED CHAMPIONSHIP

India suffers 0-3 loss to Japan in Asia Team C'ship



Druv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto at the Asia Mixed Team Championship in Japan **PHOTO: X**

QINGDAO, 14 FEB

HS Prannoy fought valiantly, but India succumbed to a 0-3 defeat against a second-string Japan in the quarterfinals of the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships, ending their campaign on a disappointing note here on Friday.

India, the 2023 bronze medalists in Dubai, struggled to find their rhythm, and trailed 0-1 after going down in the mixed doubles.

Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto, ranked 37th in the world, showed resilience before going down 13-21, 21-17, 13-21 to world number 12 Hiroki Midorikawa and Natsu Saito.

With PV Sindhu sidelined due to a hamstring injury, India faced an uphill task against Tomoka Miyazaki, who has quickly risen to world number 8 following her triumph at the 2022 World Junior Championships.

World number 31 Malvika Bansod, stepping in for Sindhu, put up a brave fight, especially in the second game, but struggled to match the control and consistency of her younger opponent and lost 12-21, 19-21, leaving India 0-2 behind.

It all came down to Prannoy to keep India alive, but despite a determined effort, the 32-year-old, returning after a long break and struggling with early-season form, couldn't sustain the pressure against world number 16 Kenta Nishimoto.

The Japanese star sealed the rubber with a 21-14, 15-21, 21-12 victory in 1 hour and 17 minutes.

India will be disappointed with the loss, especially as Japan did not field their full-strength team, with several top players absent.

Japan were the inaugural edition champions in 2017 and were runners-up in 2019.

In the men's singles, Prannoy fell behind 4-7 as Nishimoto dominated with angled returns.

The Indian clawed back to 8-8 after Nishimoto made a few errors, but two unforced mistakes gave the Japanese a three-point cushion at the break. *—PTI*

Harmanpreet: Want to qualify for 2026 WC

BHUBANESWAR, 14 FEB

Indian men's hockey team captain Harmanpreet Singh on Friday said his team's target is to win every FIH Pro League match and finish on top of the league to earn a direct ticket to the 2026 World Cup.

India will open their FIH Pro League campaign against Spain on Saturday in Bhubaneswar.

They will next play Spain again the next day, followed by matches against Germany on February 16 and 19 in the opening leg of the India tour.

Meanwhile, Indian women's hockey team skipper Salima Tete wants her side to give its best in the FIH Pro League without thinking about results, terming it a big opportunity to work on "grey areas".

"Our training is going well from Hockey India League, we have been preparing for months, have learnt a lot from HIL. We have been able to maintain our fitness as well," Harmanpreet said ahead of the FIH Pro League opener.

"We just wan to play good hockey, all players in good shape and the target is to win every game (in Pro League) looking at the World Cup," he added.

The 2026 men's hockey World Cup will be held from August 14 to 30 in Wavre, Belgium and Amstelveen, Netherlands.

Harmanpreet praised HIL's top-scorer Jugraj Singh for his flicking abilities and said the rise of next generation of domestic players augur well for the national side. *—PTI*

We are ready for India tour, says McCullum

AHMEDABAD, 14 FEB

England's head coach Brendon McCullum has dismissed suggestions that his team did not prepare adequately during their white-ball tour of India.

The New Zealand great was responding to criticism that emerged during TV commentary for the third ODI.

"Firstly, it's factually incorrect that we don't train," McCullum told 'talkSPORT' after England's third ODI defeat on Wednesday.

"We've trained plenty right throughout. It's an easy thing to have as a throwaway line that guys don't train enough when the results aren't right." *—PTI*

FIFA suspends Pak ahead of Asian Cup

LAHORE, 14 FEB

Pakistan's international soccer players are facing a hurdle after the country's federation was hit with the third FIFA suspension in less than eight years, a month before the men's national team was scheduled to start qualification for the 2027 Asian Cup.

The FIFA recently announced the latest ban after the Pakistan Football Federation Congress voted on to reject changes to its constitution that were recommended by the sport's world governing body and the Asian Football Confederation. It follows similar punishments in 2017 and 2021, which lasted five and 14 months.

"It's not surprising any more as there are power struggles in Pakistan football," footballer Navid Rahman told The Associated Press. *—PTI*

New Zealand beat Pakistan by 5 wickets, win tri-nation series

KARACHI, 14 FEB

Daryl Mitchell and Tom Latham slammed half-centuries to help New Zealand beat Pakistan by 5 wickets in the final of the tri-nation series in Karachi. Chasing 243 to win, New Zealand achieved the target in just 45.2 overs.

For Pakistan, captain Mohammad Rizwan and vice-captain Salman Ali Agha were once again the top run-scorers for the hosts, notching up 46 and 45 respectively. Late cameos from Tayyab Tahir, Faheem Ashraf and Naseem Shah helped Pakistan post 242.

In the absence of the senior quicks, Will O'Rourke stepped up admirably with a four-wicket haul, while the spinners, led by Mitchell Santner, straightjacketed Pakistan in the middle overs, limiting them to 242.

Pakistan had made one change in their playing XI. Mohammad Hasnain comes in, for Faheem Ashraf. Meanwhile, New Zealand too had made a couple of changes. Matt Henry and Ben Sears are out. Jacob Duffy and Nathan Smith are in. New Zealand pacer Ben Sears has been ruled out of the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy 2025 due to a hamstring injury.

Jacob Duffy has been named as his replacement in the squad.

Pakistan and New Zealand will face off five days later again, on 19 February, in the opening game of Champions Trophy. *—Agencies*

Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan and New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner at the toss **PHOTO: X**

Wrestlers to miss ranking series

NEW DELHI, 14 FEB

Indian wrestlers are set to miss the second Ranking Series of the year in Albania after the Sports Ministry withheld approval, blaming the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) for its failure to submit the necessary recommendations on time.

The wrestlers had already missed the first Ranking Series in Zagreb, Croatia, due to a tussle between the ministry and the suspended WFI.

The WFI, which was suspended by the ministry in December 2023 but remains recognized by the international body, had sent a last-minute proposal to the Sports Authority of India. "We are always read to sanction athletes for international tournaments but there is a laid-down procedure which we need to follow.

"Even on what basis the contingent was made was not clear as the WFI didn't conduct any trials," the source added.

The second Ranking Series is scheduled to take place in Tirana, Albania, from 26 February to 2 March. The event will be followed by the Senior Asian Championships in Amman, Jordan, in March, and the third Ranking Series in Mongolia. *—PTI*

Mourinho beat Anderlecht 3-0, qualify for EL playoff

LONDON, 14 FEB

José Mourinho's Fenerbahce might have only just squeezed into the Europa League knockout playoff round, but it is already on the brink of the round of 16.

Fenerbahce dominated to beat Anderlecht 3-0 and take a comprehensive lead to Belgium for the second leg next week.

Fenerbahce only just reached the playoffs by placing 24th in the new 36-standings format — the last qualification place, and on a tie-breaker of goal difference.

Anderlecht finished 10th, missing out on automatic progression to the last-16 by goal difference.

Two of Mourinho's former clubs, Porto and Roma, drew 1-1 in Europe's second-tier competition.

Fenerbahce took the lead in the 11th minute with a goal from Dusan Tadic. Edin Dzeko and Youssef En-Nesyri scored the other two goals for the team *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

GROUP STAGE

Here are India's 3 league opponents for Champions Trophy

India's journey in the 2025 Champions Trophy group stage will be a challenging one as they face Bangladesh, Pakistan, and New Zealand. While India boasts a strong batting line-up and quality spin attack, the competition will be fierce, with each opponent bringing unique strengths and weaknesses

PHOTO: X

Bangladesh

Strengths:
- Strongest format for Bangladesh with past success in Asia Cup and World Cup.
- Experienced players like Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur Rahim.

Weaknesses:
- Struggles with consistency against stronger teams.
- Absence of Litton Das due to poor form.

PAKISTAN

Strengths:
- Dangerous players like Fakhar Zaman, who performed exceptionally well in 2017.
- Skipper Mohammad Rizwan and finisher Salman Ali Agha in great form.

Weaknesses:
- Babar Azam's inconsistent form.
- Key injury setback with Saim Ayub ruled out.
- Weak links in the squad, including Khushdil Shah and Faheem

NEW ZEALAND

Strengths:
- Experienced white-ball players well-versed in subcontinent conditions.
- Reliable top-order with Devon Conway, Tom Latham, and Kane Williamson.

Weaknesses:
- Missing key pacers like Tim Southee and Trent Boult.
- Lack of experienced fast bowlers for subcontinental and UAE conditions.

CT winners' prize money set at $2.24M

DUBAI, 14 FEB

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has announced a significant increase in prize money for the forthcoming Champions Trophy, with victors set to receive USD 2.24 million—a 53 per cent rise from previous tournaments. This translates to nearly 20 crore in Indian currency. The runners-up will earn USD 1.12 million (around INR 9.72 crore), while each losing semi-finalist will take home USD 560,000 (INR 4.86 crore). The total prize pool for the event has escalated to USD 6.9 million (approximately INR 60 crore). Victorious teams will earn over USD 34,000 (INR 30 lakh) for each group stage win, while teams finishing fifth or sixth will receive USD 350,000 each (INR 3 crore).

The seventh and eighth placed teams will take home USD 140,000 (INR 1.2 crore). All teams are guaranteed USD 125,000 (INR 1.08 crore) for their participation. *—PTI*